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**Testimony before the Select Committee on Children
Submitted by Maggie Adair, Deputy Director
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Good afternoon, Senator Musto, Representative Urban, and members of the Select Committee on Children. I am Maggie Adair, Deputy Director of the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). CAHS is a 100-year-old statewide nonprofit organization that works to end poverty and to engage, equip, and empower all families in Connecticut to build a secure future.

I am here today to testify on behalf of Raised Bill #5160, An Act Concerning Results-Based Accountability (RBA). CAHS supports government transparency, particularly as it relates to the well-being of Connecticut children. An annual report card developed by the Select Committee in conjunction with the Office of Fiscal Analysis, the Office of Legislative Research, and the Commission on Children has the potential to provide policymakers and the public with a powerful picture of the components of child well-being and how Connecticut is doing to support all of our children.

There are several points, however, that we would like to add to the proposed legislation. First, the RBA process is meant to answer three questions: How much did we do, how well did we do it, and is anyone better off for our effort? Report cards should include data on agency and program activities, expenditures, service delivery, quality assurance processes, and client outcomes. As the Program Review and Investigations (PRI) Committee report exemplified, a report card should include an RBA accountability framework, population-level outcomes, system- and program-level performance measures, and a data and research development agenda. Only state-level population outcomes and the development of a data and research agenda are included in the raised bill.

Second, as we have learned through our experience with the Connecticut Kids Count Project, a national initiative to use data and public education to influence public policy on behalf of children and families, state-level aggregated data do not provide an adequate view of the lives of all Connecticut children. As you know, health and family economic security vary widely across our state. Children in our poorest cities and even our inner-ring suburbs live far different lives than those of their peers in our wealthiest suburbs. In order for Connecticut to reduce poverty by half as directed by the General Assembly, our policymakers must understand the varying experiences of children according to race and ethnicity, income, and geography.

Third, the report card should include a placeholder for those measures that currently do not exist. The PRI study found high-quality data and systems capability do not currently exist in many state agencies. The Select Committee's report card should not remain silent on this point or you will continue to promote a belief that we have all the pieces we need to complete the puzzle that links child poverty and child well-being.

Fourth, information on the many children who remain outside of Connecticut's human services, education, and child safety systems is needed. We encourage the Select Committee to drill deeper to determine how best to obtain data on this large group of children.

We applaud the Committee for raising this bill addressing data and transparency about child well-being. However, collecting data from Connecticut's state agencies is a challenging task. As the nonprofit collecting and analyzing data for the Kids Count Project, we have found that agencies collect data in different formats, some are very open to share public data while other agencies are not as forthcoming. This should not be the case. The information is public information and should be made readily accessible in one central place and in one consistent format.

Finally, as you are aware, the Child Poverty and Prevention Council was charged, through legislation, to cut child poverty in half by 2014. In fact, child poverty has increased since the legislation passed in 2004 – based on data even before the recession hit. Connecticut has the greatest wealth gap in the nation and it continues to grow at an alarming rate. We are seeing poor children remain very poor and middle-class children falling into poverty. Connecticut cannot continue to let this continue. This very wealthy state has the resources and capacity to enact public policy that will help families become economically secure and ensure children grow into educated, productive future workers. This bill takes us one step in the right direction by making data more transparent.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with about this important matter.